

Environmental Assessment
Exchange of Lands
Bridgeport Charter Township
and
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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Chapter 1. Purpose and Need

The purpose of this exchange is to align ownership of three tracts of public lands with the mission and goals of the respective land-owning entities. The proposal is to exchange the 66-acre Warner Tract of Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) for 302 acres of lands adjacent to Fort and Sheridan Roads owned by Bridgeport Charter Township (BCT).

The need for this exchange is to protect in perpetuity as part of the refuge the lands adjacent to Fort and Sheridan Roads. Further, land to be divested to BCT by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will enable the Township to pursue construction of an environmental education facility such as the Great Lakes Discovery Center or a sporting goods retail facility. Exchanging these lands will more closely align future management with the resource mission and responsibility of the respective entities.

1.1 Decisions that Need to be Made

The Regional Director for the Midwest Region (Region 3 of the USFWS) will need to make two decisions based on this EA: (1) select an alternative and (2) determine if the selected alternative is a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, thus requiring preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The authors of this EA have recommended Alternative A, Transfer of Lands, to the Regional Director. If the Regional Director concurs, a Finding of No Significant Impact will be signed and the transfer may proceed.

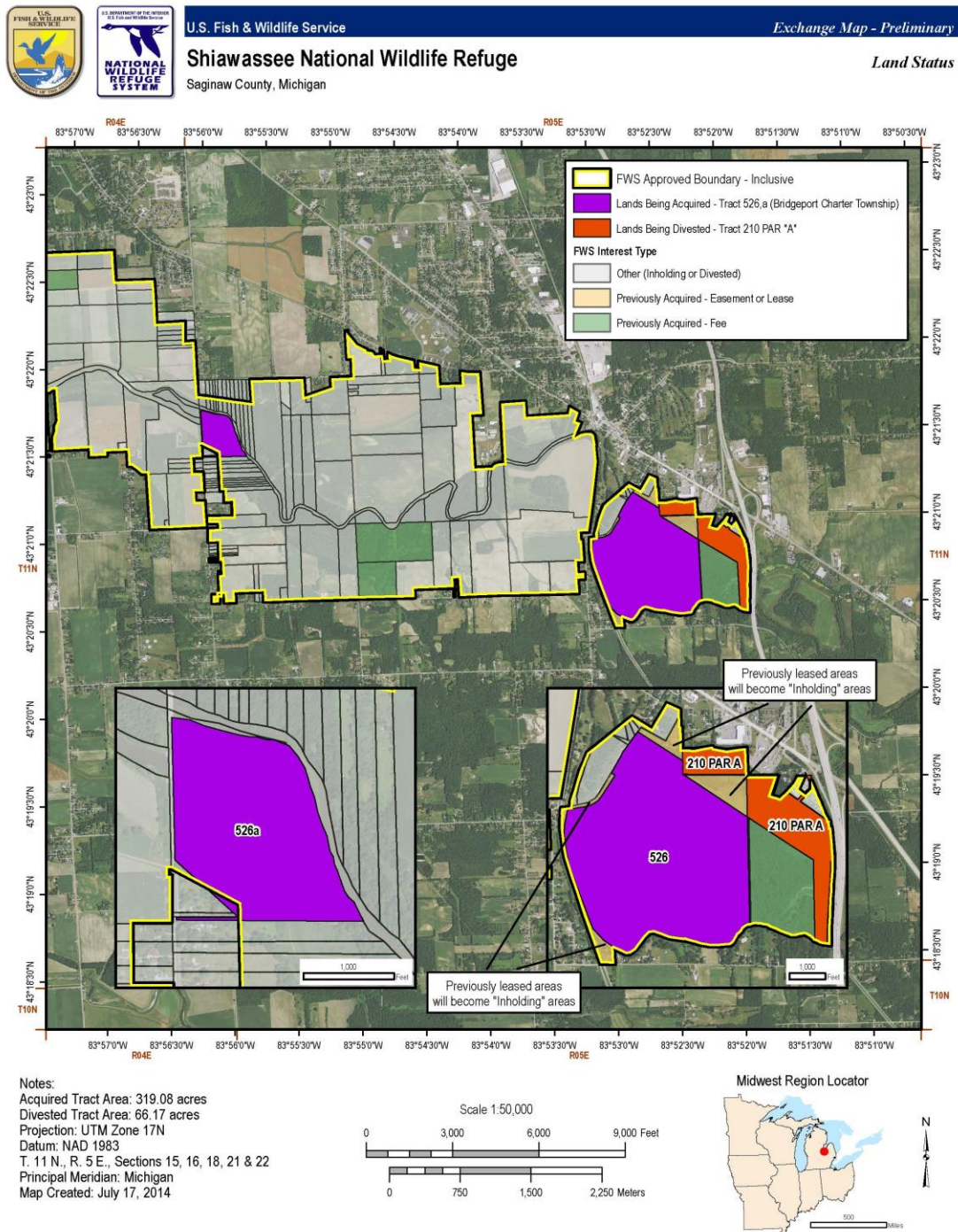
1.2 Background

The three parcels proposed for exchange were acquired at different times and for unique reasons. The one characteristic they do share is that their natural features and locations do not fit with the respective managing entity's mission and goals.

The USFWS's Warner Tract is comprised of upland hardwood forest, old orchard, and oldfield areas directly adjacent to Interstate 75. This tract does not meet the National Wildlife Refuge System's criteria of providing outstanding habitat for migratory birds or containing federal threatened or endangered plants or animals. BCT desires this tract because it provides an upland area to construct an environmental education facility and it has access to the Interstate Highway.

The Sheridan and Fort Road Tracts to be divested by BCT contain high quality wetlands and riparian habitats which are unsuitable for construction. However, these tracts provide outstanding habitat for migratory birds and would make good additions to Shiawassee NWR.

Figure 1. Proposed land transfer (orange lands to be divested by USFWS, purple to be divested by BCT).



Chapter 2. Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action

2.1 Alternatives not Considered for Detailed Analysis

No other alternatives were considered.

2.2 Alternative A (Proposed Action)

The proposed action is to exchange the Warner Tract of Shiawassee NWR for the Fort and Sheridan Roads Tracts owned by BCT.

Exchanging these lands between entities will consolidate ownership and more closely align future management with the resource mission and responsibility of the respective entities.

2.3 Alternative B (Current Management or No Action)

Alternative B would continue the current ownership and management of all the properties. The parcels would be administered under existing agency management plans and subject to existing policies and regulations. See Background and Affected Environment sections for details on current management.

Chapter 3. Affected Environment

3.1 Physical Characteristics, Habitat and Biological Environment

Warner Tract:

Approximately one-third of this 66-acre unit is comprised of upland hardwood forest dominated by American beech and sugar maple. Other species include eastern white pine, northern red oak, and American basswood. A third of the unit is occupied by an old, abandoned apple orchard. The tract also has oldfield habitat dominated by grasses and goldenrod and a small forested wetland dominated by silver maple and green ash. A large barn and garage exist on the site.

Fort Road Tract:

Approximately 80 percent of this 264-acre unit is comprised of forested wetland dominated by silver maple and green ash. Other species include box-elder, eastern cottonwood, and red maple. Approximately 20 percent of the unit is comprised of shrub marsh dominated by buttonbush. This tract is bordered on two sides by the Cass River and is entirely within the river's floodplain. The tract is used extensively by migratory waterfowl and neotropical migrant songbirds and it harbors a large great blue heron rookery.

Sheridan Road Tract:

Approximately 40 percent of this 38-acre unit is comprised of forested wetland

dominated by silver maple and green ash. Other species include box-elder, eastern cottonwood, and red maple. Approximately 40 percent of the unit is comprised of emergent marsh dominated by buttonbush. This tract is bisected by the Cass River and is entirely within the river's floodplain. The tract is used extensively by migratory waterfowl, wading birds, and neotropical migrant songbirds.

3.2 Threatened, Endangered, and Candidate Species

No known federally-listed plant or animal species occupy the exchange areas.

3.3 Cultural/Paleontological Resources

No structures that are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places are found on the parcels involved in this exchange. In 2000, a cultural resources overview report was completed for all properties within the Shiawassee NWR and its acquisition boundary. Three archaeological sites were found on the Warner Tract. However, onsite investigations have not been completed and additional cultural sites may remain undiscovered.

Chapter 4. Environmental Consequences

4.1 Environmental Consequences Shared by Alternatives

Wetlands on all properties will be preserved under state and federal regulations in both the Proposed Action (Alternative A) and Current Management (Alternative B).

4.1.1 Cultural Resources

The Service is mandated to protect cultural and historical resources by various laws and regulations, including the Archaeological Resources Protection Act. Under both alternatives, any such resources on land owned by the Service would receive full protection. Under both alternatives, BCT would not be mandated to protect cultural and historic resources on land under its ownership and there is no guarantee that any existing resources would be safeguarded.

4.1.2 Cumulative Impacts

The term “cumulative impacts” refers to impacts on the environment that result from the incremental impact of the proposed action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. No foreseeable cumulative impacts will occur as the result of this land exchange.

4.1.3 Environmental Justice

Neither of the management alternatives described in this EA will disproportionately place any adverse environmental, economic, social, or health impacts on minority and low-

income populations.

4.2 Table 1. Summary of Environmental Consequences by Alternative

	Alternative A: Proposed Land Transfer	Alternative B: No Action
Habitat Management	Increased. Lands owned by the Service will receive increased habitat maintenance (e.g. exotic and invasive species management).	Stable. Habitat maintenance and/or protection will continue based on existing plans and mandates.
Wildlife Populations	Stable to Increased. Some species will benefit from increased habitat prescriptions and Service oversight. Refuge Trust species, especially migratory birds, should increase slightly due to agency attentions.	Stable. Natural plant community succession will benefit some species and will be detrimental to others over time.
Endangered Species	Stable. Natural reintroduction of endangered vertebrate and invertebrate species is possible over time.	Same as Alternative A
Public Use	Increased. Visitation to a BCT environmental education facility could number in the ten thousands.	Stable. Public use will continue under existing agency plans and mandates.

List of Preparers

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Provided coordination with agencies, the public, and overall direction and editing.

Consultation and Coordination with the Public and Others

This EA was prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and agency policies. This document will be made available for public review and comment for at least 30 days prior to an agency decision on implementation.